China and India: Strategic Partnership and Cooperation

China and India are two rapidly developing superpowers which are connected through fairly complex relations. Formally speaking, both nations are maintaining their status of being developing large regional nations and each is focused on their “own” region: India is focused on Southern Asia where it is one of the leading members in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) while China looks towards East Asia. In this respect, the actively developing bilateral relations between China and India that have been observed over the last few weeks and have entered a trajectory of stable and dynamic growth do indeed call heightened attention to themselves.

Over the years, China has become India’s primary trading partner and the volume of trade between these countries annually grows at a breakneck speed. The countries have set a goal to increase trade from its current $80 billion to $100 billion by 2015. Chinese businesses play an important role in improving Indian infrastructure and hold a stable position on the Indian market in sectors like electricity, communications and metallurgy.

In recent years, through BRICS, the BASIC Countries, G20 and other joint associations, China and India have pursued effective cooperation in areas like combating the financial crisis and climate change, assisting in multipolarizing the world today, democratising international communications as well as protecting the rights of developing countries.

These two countries are the potential superpowers of tomorrow who will both contend for global leadership. The foundations of this rivalry can already be seen in many sectors, particularly in the supply of hydrocarbons as well as in the competition for commodity and investment markets.

Apart from the economy, mutual rivalry and heightened caution is exhibited in military and political aspects, which is largely caused by the consequences of the Sino-Indian War of 1962.

India has long been alarmed by the steady development and rearmament of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army, the plans to develop the Chinese oceanic fleet and the creation of the “String of Pearls”, a string of military bases for the Chinese People’s Liberation Army in the Indian Ocean, which a number of Indian defence strategists see as further escalating Chinese military superiority over India.

For certain political circles in India, opposing China is more important than opposing their age-old enemy of Pakistan. This cautious attitude is periodically intensified amidst China’s active participation in modernising Pakistani armed forces, which spurs a mutual arms race and forces the country to concentrate a large group of armed forces on its border. However, over the last 15 years, China has held a neutral position in the Indo-Pakistani conflict surrounding Kashmir and aims to engage in more constructive dialogue with India.

In turn, China is worried about the military cooperation between India and the countries that fear China’s rise and are aiming to create a sufficient geopolitical counterweight to the Celestial Kingdom.

However, despite the presence of certain challenges and disagreements in the Sino-Indian relations, what should be noted is the absence of a predisposition that they may be enemies. Today, the development of the global economic and political environment significantly depends on the relations between these two countries, but it is still currently...
taking place amidst the regional and international rivalry between China and India. The present battle is currently being won with a certain lead by Beijing, which is not only ahead of New Delhi in terms of GDP by 4.5 times, but has also demonstrated its complete independence from Washington and the west. One telling sign of this was the first official foreign visit of the new Chinese administration, which was made not to the US, but to Moscow, and which resulted in the conclusion of a series of fairly impressive contracts between China and Russia in the energy, trade, economic and military sectors.

For now, India is not showing any independence from the west. Together with its various statements about its “independent course”, New Delhi, with a clear glance towards the US, is also advocating “the unification of democratic forces in Asia” under the auspices of Washington, all the while being aware that these “unifications” have clear anti-Chinese motives.

This environment justifies the heightened interest towards the development of Indo-Chinese contacts in the recent weeks, which have gone beyond the borders of bilateral daily communications and are increasingly acquiring global and practical significance for the region and beyond. Communications between the two countries show evidence that China is being particularly active in the matter. China is also demonstrating that it perceives India as a natural partner in regional and international cooperation, which opens up new opportunities for both nations, especially for China.

Chinese ambassador to New Delhi Wei Wei has offered a fairly detailed discussion of the view held by Beijing towards developing ties with India in his interview with the Hindi Indian newspaper. In particular, he noted the following focus areas for the developing bilateral relations:

- Actively developing foreign policy exchanges at the highest government levels, which particularly include the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visiting New Delhi on June 8 with an official visit and as a Beijing special envoy to establish direct contacts with the new Indian administration, as well as the leaders’ meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Brazil
- Furthering pragmatic bilateral cooperation in all fields, primarily in developing infrastructure, manufacturing, agriculture, with a focus on large-scale projects, including railway transport and industrial parks
- Beijing promoting an expansion of Chinese investments into India; India promoting further interest from Indian businesses towards the Chinese market
- Developing cultural exchanges and humanitarian ties between the nations, intensifying cooperation between sister cities
- Fostering cooperation in regional and international affairs, close coordination of positions on key issues as part of BRICS, China-Russian-India cooperation, G20 and East Asia Summit
- Expending additional efforts to resolve the differences between the two countries to maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas with the goal of settling the boundary issue in phases
- Beijing is viewing the recent winner of the Indian parliamentary elections Narendra Modi as an “effective manager”, who will focus on the economic aspects of the partnership and will respect the national interests for deepening reforms, improving the economy and increasing the population’s welfare.

These areas of bilateral cooperation were the focus of active discussion in June of this year initiated by the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, which have been carefully monitored by the political and business communities not only in the region itself, but in the west as well. The special importance of the Chinese Foreign Minister’s trip to New Delhi is also emphasized by the fact that this was the first official foreign visit conducted by a high-ranking official to India after Narendra Modi took power of the Indian government.

With unconcealed disappointment, the White House had to admit that the visit to New Delhi conducted by Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Nisha Biswal at around the same time could not compare to the Chinese minister both in terms of the quality of contacts and the contents of the visit overall. Washington realises that the new Indian government is attempting to assert itself in its domestic affairs, primarily in its own region, shifting its stance from the position of a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement towards “strategic autonomy” and focusing on resolving issues pertaining to internal development. These are India’s main goals as it selects its foreign partners to strengthen its leadership in the region and expand contacts on the global arena.
The active development of bilateral ties between China and India that has occurred over the last few days can even be an important piece of evidence that Washington will re-evaluate its approach to politics in Beijing and New Delhi as well as the decline of US influence in the region and, increasingly, in other regions, due to the losing policy being pursued by the White House in recent years.

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